UNITED STATES ARMY CHAPLAIN
CENTER AND SCHOOL

"Ministry In Civil Disturbance"

Techniques of Research
C22-B-19

30 November 1973

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INTRODUCTION

"Let us remember this, under the law the Federal Government cannot, on the ordinary normal case of keeping order and preventing rioting, cannot move into a state until the state is not able to handle the matter"[1], stated President Eisenhower in a news conference on 5 September 1956, at Washington, D.C. In making this statement our Commander in Chief laid down a policy which set the pattern for Federal intervention in civil and racial disturbances within the seperate states.

By viewing five of the civil and racial disturbances of the 1950's and 1960's through interviews conducted with Chaplains who were present and involved in the disturbances we will identify the impact of their ministries upon the men they served. Within these five disturbances we will see the Chaplain's ministry and its effect upon soldiers in a racial troubled city, in troop holding areas, in a city plauged with civil disorder and in a city invaded by anti-war marchers.

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[1] The New York Times, September 6, 1956, p. 8.

I. LITTLE ROCK

In September 1957, Arkansas Governor Orval E. Faubus opposed the admittance of nine black students to Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas. In so doing, he defied an order of the Federal Government.

> Governor Faubus ordered a strong force of National Guard to prevent a few negroes from entering a high school; President Eisenhower immediately ordered the Arkansas National Guard into federal service and assigned them to enforce the same laws that Governor Faubus had been trying to defy. The soldiers and officers of the Arkansas National Guard are the only ones in modern history who have been on both sides of a "war" within a week.[2]

This points up the tense situation within Little Rock at that time.

On the morning of 24 September the citizens of Little Rock awoke to find some 1,200 paratroopers of the 101st. Airborne Division encircling the high school and occupying Camp Robinson outside Little Rock. Among the units of the 101st. ordered to Little Rock was the 327th. Airborne Infantry Battle Group. Chaplain (Colonel) Chester R. Lindsey, a Major at the time, was the Battle Group Chaplain who accompained it to Little Rock.[3]

The mission of the Battle Group was to cordon off a two block area around Central High School and to control the entrances and exits to the school. After several days the black troopers

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[2]Robin Higham, ed. Bayonets in the Streets. (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1969), p. 101.

[3]Chaplain (COL) Chester R. Lindsey, private interview held at USACHCS, Ft. Hamilton, New York, October 1973.

were pulled off the front lines to prevent unnecessary incidents. The Chaplain then expanded his ministry of helping the troopers understand why they were in Little Rock, to helping the command explain to the black troopers why they were pulled back. This task was simplified by all the officers leveling with the troopers regarding the situation and by emphasizing the importance of remaining calm. This leveling with the troopers, particularly by the Chaplain in his troop visitations, helped to disperse the disillusionment among the troopers as to their purpose in Little Rock.

Chaplain Lindsey became aware of the citizens' feelings toward the Army when he endeavored to obtain an organist for the services he conducted at Camp Robinson, Central High School and the Armory. He finally got an organist, but she was considered a "traitor" by the citizens. Chaplain Lindsey constantly sought to establish a rapport with the civilian community and only made progress after four weeks. Even the ministers, one of whom was a seminary classmate, received him coldly, or not at all, until the later part of October. He was successful in establishing the necessary rapport, however, by visiting the individual ministers, attending the Little Rock Ministerial Alliance and constantly conducting himself as a man-of-God. He realized the fruit of his efforts when upon being asked, and accepting with command approval, he spoke at the Little Rock Ministerial Alliance in November.

Near the end of the Battle Group's stay in Little Rock several of the pastors invited the troopers to attend their church.

The Battle Group Commander, as did Chaplain Lindsey, through this was a splendid idea. There was one point, however, that the Chaplain and the Commander did not agree upon. The Commander told each of his Company Commanders to send twenty of their best dressed and best mannered men to church. Chaplain Lindsey took issue with this in view of the fact that those who wanted to attend a civilian church should be the ones allowed to go. The Commander accepted the Chaplain's suggestion and a goodly number of troopers attended church in Little Rock.

There were no major incidents in Little Rock involving the 101st. Troopers from their arrival until their departure on the morning of 27 November 1957. This was partially due to the constant availability of the Chaplain, his openess and honesty with the troopers, his success in keeping the morale high and the rapport he established with the civilians of the community.

II. UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI AND UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

The Little Rock situation shows the ministry of a Chaplain assigned to a unit committed to the front line of a racial disturbance. At the integrations of The University of Mississippi (October 1962) and The University of Alabama (May 1963) U.S. Army troops were again committed to insure that federal law was upheld. In both of these cases Chaplain (Major) Henry F. Ackerman, then a First Lieutenant, was assigned to units deployed to forward holding areas.[4]

Chaplain Ackerman was deployed with the 2d Battle Group, 1st. Infantry, 2d. Infantry Division from Ft. Benning, Georgia to Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi. They were alerted early on the morning of 1 October and by 0500 hours the entire Battle Group was on the road to Mississippi. This quick departure resulted in Chaplain Ackerman doing extensive counseling due to the soldiers not having their affairs in order and to other personal and family matters. Add to this the constant task of keeping up the morale of the men who were just waiting, and we see the primary ministry of the Chaplain during this crisis. Chaplain Ackerman did hold services the one Sunday they were in Mississippi.

The most difficult situation arose as the tension mounted

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[4]Chaplain (MAJ) Henry F. Ackerman, private interview held at USACHCS, Ft. Hamilton, New York, November 1973.

and the word spread that the black soldiers would not be going into Oxford. They then began to ask "Why?", and to state "We're as good as anybody." The Chaplain then had to answer the blacks and to help keep the tension within the unit tolerable for the twelve days they were at Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi.

Seven months later The University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa faced a similiar disturbance. Again Chaplain' Ackerman's unit, now the 1st. Battalion, 87th. Infantry, 2d. Infantry Division, was deployed to Ft. McClellan, Alabama where the Battalion set up in the summer camp area. This not only meant the soldiers had decent facilities, but the Chaplain had a chapel to use as a place of worship and as an office. The chapel made it convienent for conducting daily morning and evening services as well as the Sunday services.

As expected, Chaplain Ackerman did a lot of counseling resulting from the deployment of the Battalion. He helped eliminate some problems by encouraging daily truck runs to and from Ft. Benning for mail and the soldiers.

The last week the 1/87th. was at Ft. McClellan, Chaplain Ackerman conducted a successful one day religious retreat which the men received well.

The personal contact Chaplain Ackerman had with the soldiers, his counseling program and his well planned religious activities were vital to the success of the Battalion's mission during the integration of The University of Alabama.

III. DETROIT

Early the morning of 23 July 1967 Detroit police raided a speakeasy in the already tense West Side's Twelth Street area. The blacks accused the police of brutality; the police reacted; a riot broke out, and looting and arson followed. Within hours the Michigan National Guard moved in to squelch the disturbance which had become a large scale civil disorder. By 1100 hours two brigades of Airborne Infantry, one from Ft. Campbell and one from Ft. Bragg, had arrived at Selfridge Air Force Base outside Detroit. Among the units of the 82d Airborne Infantry Division committed to Detroit was the 2d Battalion, 505th Infantry of the 3rd. Brigade. Chaplain (Major) Robert L. Gushwa, then a Captain, was the Battalion Chaplain.[5]

Prior to arriving at Selfridge Air Force Base and before the men saw the disaster in Detroit, Chaplain Gushwa was asked two questions: (1) The black troopers were asking if they were going to have to fire on their "brothers"; and (2) The white troopers were asking whether they would have to fire on their fellow Americans. The Chaplain endeavored to assure them that all hoped no firing would be necessary, but if it was it would not be according to race or nationality. Too, he was constantly alerting the troopers to the necessity of "hanging lose" and

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[5]Chaplain (MAJ) Robert L. Gushwa, private interview held at USACHCS, Ft. Hamilton, New York, November 1973.

waiting to see what unfolded once they were on line. The men also asked Chaplain Gushwa how he felt about the situation. In reply he gave them his true "gut" feelings which they appreciated and which helped strengthen the rapport between the troopers and the Chaplain.

Chaplain Gushwa spent a large portion of his time, day and night, visiting the troopers on guard at street corners, at federal buildings, at city buildings, at stores and in the alert areas. It was in the alert areas that he conducted chapel services for the troops.

In the midst of providing Chaplain's coverage for the men Chaplain Gushwa was able to establish rapport with the civilians of the community. The civilians felt free to talk with him as they would any minister. They even revealed information to him that they would tell no other officer, as well as expressing to him their gratitude for the Army's presence in Detroit. Chaplain Gushwa, with command clearance, accepted an invitation to preach at one of the churches in the area. Refusing to speak about the disturbance, he preached on the love of Christ and its healing and unifying effect.

As a result of the troopers and policemen working together Chaplain Gushwa established a fruitful relationship with the policemen. Entering a police station one day he found 100 prisoners sitting on the floor of a shooting gallery. They had not been fed because, according to the police, the cafe where they obtained food had been burned down. Upon seeing this inhumanity, Chaplain

Gushwa expressed disgust, which resulted in the prisoners being fed.

Chaplain Gushwa's ministry in Detroit involved extensive counseling, continuous troop visitation, and building rapport between the civilian and the military during the two weeks the 2/505th. was in Detroit.

IV. WASHINGTON

November 1969 brings us to the last incident to be viewed in this paper--the anti-war demonstration by 300,000 people in our Nation's Capitol. To assist in maintaining order the 91st. Engineer Battalion, Ft. Belvoir, Virginia, was alerted the morning of 14 November. For fifteen hours the soldiers waited in vehicles prior to moving into Washington. During this long delay the Battalion Chaplain, Chaplain (Major) John C. Britcher, then a Captain, visited with the men, allowing them to ventilate, as he endeavored to help them see why they were on alert for an anti-war demonstration.[6]

That night the Battalion moved into the Navy Building, near the Washington Monument, where they remained on alert throughout the march and rally. During this time Chaplain Britcher continued his troop visitation in order to keep emotions and tempers at low levels. All was going fine until some of the marchers threw stones, followed by tear gas, through the glass front doors of the Navy Building. This caused emotions to run high among the soldiers. Chaplain Britcher then recommended to his Battalion Commander that the entire Battalion be called together for a discussion of the situation. This was done. The Battalion Commander spoke briefly followed by the Chaplain who pointed up the moral

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[6]Chaplain (MAJ) John C. Britcher, private interview held at USACHCS, Ft. Hamilton, New York, November 1973.

rights of both sides and emphasized that the soldiers must act responsibly whether the marchers do or not. This was followed by a question and answer period. The entire discussion was most effective in easing tension among the soldiers.

Early the next morning, Sunday, 16 November, the Battalion moved back to Ft. Belvoir where Chaplain Britcher conducted his regular scheduled worship service. The entire situation lasted less than three days, but the ministry of the Chaplain in visiting, counseling and explaining the mission to the soldiers was most valuable in preventing serious incidents among the soldiers.

V. CONCLUSION

The interviews conducted with the four chaplains involved in civil and/or racial disturbances of the 1950's and 1960's show that their ministry was basically the same as for any chaplain. It involved extensive counseling regarding family and personal problems, being knowledgeable of the mission in order to explain it to the soldiers, being available to all, visiting regularly, advising the commander on religious and moral issues, conducting religious services, being honest with the soldiers and endeavoring to establish rapport with the civilians where applicable. The ministry of the chaplain in these situations proved invaluable to the soldiers and to the United States Army in fulfilling the mission with no embarrassing incidents.

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